

WISCONSIN FRESH START PROGRAM (WFS)

BACKGROUND

The Wisconsin Fresh Start (WFS) Program, created in 1998, is a hands-on construction-related training program that prepares at-risk young people ages 16 to 24 to become self-sufficient, productive citizens. It also expands the supply of affordable, energy-efficient housing in Wisconsin communities. The program is administered by the Department of Commerce's Division of Housing and Community Development. WFS is based on the successful Madison based Operation Fresh Start Inc. service model. Sponsors include nonprofit organizations.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Youth Support Services include the following components:

Counseling: Individual/peer counseling, group sessions, case management, and referrals.

Education: Academic skills, GED preparation, vocational skills, job/college readiness skills, leadership development, construction theory and terminology, driver's education, follow-up

Leadership Development: Decision-making, speaking, group facilitation, negotiating, community service, retreats and advocacy.

Job Training: Supervised construction training, employer expectations, job readiness skills, vocational education training, and coordination with pre-apprenticeship programs.

Graduate Resources: School admission counseling, scholarships, pre-employment training, career counseling, job search/development/ placement and follow-up counseling/support.

FUNDING

Funding for the program is provided from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and local community funds.

SUCCESS RATE

The program enrolls approximately 150 participants annually in a dozen communities with over 80% of these participants receiving their high school diploma or an HSED equivalent, basic skills competency or increase of two grade levels. Of the youth enrolled 70% have completed the program and have achieved self-sufficiency as defined by self-supporting employment, no further criminal justice contacts and enrollment in post-secondary education. WFS completes 11 to 16 affordable housing units annually, benefiting low income homebuyers or renters.

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